

Enough: God's Blessings in Abundance

Introduction to <i>Being Reformed: Faith Seeking Understanding</i>	3
Introduction to <i>Enough: God's Blessings in Abundance</i>	4
Session 1. We Don't Have Enough	5
Session 2. Becoming Unbound from Fears of Not Enough	11
Session 3. Enough to Make a Difference	18
Session 4. Enough for Transformational Giving	24
Session 5. Enough Is Good for the Body.....	30
Session 6. How Much Is Enough to Leave Our Children?	36
Suggestions for Further Study.....	43

We Don't Have Enough

Scripture

Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15
Jesus feeds the five thousand.

John 6:1–58 Jesus walks on the water and then identifies himself as the bread of life.

Prayer

Thank you, dear God, for all the ways you feed us and give us what we most value in life. We implore you to free us from the myth of inadequacy, to strengthen our ability to trust in your faithfulness. We commit ourselves to seek your kingdom first. O God, whose grace is sufficient for all our needs, hear our prayer through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

The account of the feeding of the five thousand helps us challenge our society's culture of scarcity and clarify what is most important to have *enough* of. The story begins with the disciples assembling to report to Jesus on all they'd done. As they were enthusiastically caught up in what they were doing for Jesus, imagine James's and John's impatience in waiting their turn to tell their story! Imagine James the Less holding back until the others finished. Even more, imagine Jesus not really needing to keep score of who had done what and interrupting them to say, "Let's take a break and get a little rest." Perhaps Jesus wanted them to take some time to center themselves, get their priorities in line, and refocus on what it was God was doing. Jesus got them into a boat and headed for a remote place where they could be alone. Just picture the disciples' glee in anticipation of this time with Jesus.

Some folks saw Jesus leaving and raced ahead. They spread the word that they'd seen Jesus. Whole families set out on foot, some of them running ahead so that when Jesus and the disciples arrived on the shore, he saw a huge crowd of folks waiting for him. "Well, so much

for the rest,” he must have thought. “These folks are desperate for a word from me. They need to see God’s presence with them. They need to see their story as part of God’s story.” Jesus’ heart went out to them. They seemed like lost sheep looking for their shepherd. Jesus was their shepherd. His compassion for them overrode his desire to be alone with his disciples. He turned from his disciples and turned to those whose need was so crushing. If Jesus was disappointed not to have enough time to “get away,” he didn’t show it.

Visualize the disciples waiting impatiently. At some point, they must have decided this interruption had gone on long enough. A group of the disciples slipped up to Jesus and caught his eye. They said to him, “Hey, it’s getting late. These folks have a long walk home. Pronounce the benediction so they can leave and go get their supper.”

Jesus looked at the disciples and realized that they didn’t get it. He said to them, “You feed them.”

Philip calculated the cost of feeding the crowd at more than six months’ salary. The disciples had already left everything to follow Jesus. Surely Jesus didn’t expect them to foot this bill, too? They must have blurted out to Jesus, “You’re kidding! Even if we had the money, it would cost a fortune to feed all these people. We don’t have enough to feed them.”

Jesus was serious. This was the point of his ministry. “Feed them.”

A Problem, A Solution

Each of the Gospel writers confirms that five thousand men were present. Many of them came with families, boosting the numbers considerably. How did they take an inventory quickly in that large crowd? Did they simply shout out, “Who’s got something extra to eat that they’re willing to share?” That would be like asking the congregation during the announcements on Sunday morning, “Who wants to stay up all night with the middle schoolers for a lock-in on Friday night?” or “Who will stay after worship and spend a few hours polishing the pews?”

If that’s what the disciples did, then it is not really surprising that only one child spoke up to offer the snack his mother had prepared, five barley loaves and two dried fish—the food of the poor. Can’t you hear his mother saying, “Son, I made that food for *you*. You know how whiney you get when you’re hungry. You don’t have enough to share. Put your hand down.”

Of course, don’t you imagine there were other mothers who brought food along? Most parents today can’t go anywhere without

snacks in the car. Men and women surely had something tucked into their belts or in their packs, right?

This child was the only one in the crowd whose instinct was generosity. It didn't matter to Jesus that only one made an offering. The child's offering was enough.

Andrew said, "There's a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. I know it isn't enough. What are they among so many? How can such a small offering meet such overwhelming need? What shall we do?"

Jesus said, "Get the people to sit down in groups." He took what had been offered, gave thanks to God, and fed all who were hungry. When they had eaten their fill, Jesus told the disciples to gather the leftovers so that nothing was wasted, and they gathered twelve baskets.

Why did Jesus have them gather the leftovers? Did Jesus then instruct the disciples to take those baskets to the local soup kitchen to feed the homeless? Surely Jesus didn't want the twelve disciples lugging those baskets around. They traveled lighter than that, and it seems they were too weary for a big party that night. What *is* clear is that Jesus didn't want them to waste anything. Even the leftovers are worth something; even those who feel like they are the "leftovers" are worth something. Who was given the responsibility for those twelve baskets of leftover food? Who has responsibility for the "leftover" people?

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Jesus fed all those people. All four Gospel writers attest to this. We cannot explain it; if we spend too much time worrying over the details, we miss the miraculous, the extraordinary thing that is happening right before our eyes.

Missing the Point

The crowd realized that God was at work among them and that they had become part of God's story. They remembered how God had rescued their ancestors from slavery in Egypt, how God provided their ancestors with manna each morning, and how every evening the quail came. Did anyone start humming "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"? This would be a great ending for this story, except that it isn't.

Jesus slipped away because the exuberant crowd wanted to crown him king. He knew the kind of king they were looking for—someone

miraculously to meet their needs, their immediate and temporal needs. Jesus had something much bigger in mind.

As Jesus slipped away, he sent the disciples down to get in the boats and head back to the other side of the lake. Jesus went off to pray, something he'd been longing to do. As the disciples made their way across the water, a big wind blew up, churning the sea. The disciples became anxious again. When they saw Jesus walking on the water, near their boat, they were terrified, wondering what Jesus was doing now. Jesus reassured them, "It's just me. I am with you. Do not be afraid." They took Jesus on board and soon reached their destination.

The next day those who had camped on the hillside with their bellies full of bread and fish piled into boats and headed across the lake, looking for Jesus, wanting more. When they found him, they said to him, "Teacher, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, "You've come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you when you thought there was not enough. You just want another free lunch. Don't waste your energy like that. Work for the food that nourishes your life, that satisfies you so you know how much is enough and what will last eternally. The point is that God is feeding you now, giving you all you need."

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They replied, "Give us this bread, now and forever."

Jesus told them, "I am the bread of life. I came to be bread for the hungry world. That was God's plan: that anyone who sees me and trusts that I am God's Son, aligning their story with mine, will have their needs met, now and eternally."

When Jesus said, "I am the bread from heaven," the arguing began. "Don't we know his father and mother? How can he say he came from heaven? He came from Nazareth."

Jesus responded, "Don't bicker among yourselves. I am telling you the truth: My grace is sufficient for all your needs. Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life. I am the bread of life, broken for you. Come, you who are hungry. Come and be fed."

Is More Better?

Most of us have trouble believing we have enough. In 2006, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported that the average personal-savings rate dipped into negative numbers at -0.5 percent. Not only were Americans not saving, we were dipping into our savings—a phenomenon not seen since the Great Depression.¹ Though the rate has moved back into positive numbers in recent years, on average the American household currently saves less than 4 percent of its income.

When we want more, our contemporary culture has plenty of ways to finance our desires. In January 2010, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston reported that the average consumer has 2.7 credit cards.² Also in 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau found that Americans had more than \$886 billion in credit-card debt. This amount was projected to increase to \$1.177 trillion in 2011. The report also states that average credit-card debt for each cardholder was \$5,100 in 2010, with an expectation for this number to reach \$6,500 by the end of 2011.³

If we fear we do not have enough, then more must be better. All this becomes so overwhelming that we begin to believe that “not enough” and the need for more are normal. The destructive myths—*that there is not enough, that more is better, and that this is just the way it is*—give us permission to distort reality and lead us to believe we are helpless.

We know that we will always be reaching out, seeking to extend ourselves and what we have to obtain more. It is a natural human reaction, even when it means we hurt other people along the way. It reflects our self-centeredness, our focus on our own needs and these alone.

So we need a way out of thinking that more is better. We need a focus on Jesus as the one who can give us new perspectives. When we realize it is Jesus who is the “bread of life” (John 6:35), who brings us meaning and true life, then we can give up the race to gain more. Jesus is always enough.

When we become caught in the spiral of not enough, the need for more is addictive.

1. investopedia.com/articles/pf/08/in-over-your-head.asp#axzz1VOz5uiQg, accessed August 18, 2011.
2. creditcards.com/credit-card-news/credit-card-industry-facts-personal-debt-statistics-1276.php#Card-ownership, accessed August 18, 2011.
3. hoffmanbrinker.com/credit-card-debt-statistics.html (source: money-zine.com/Financial-Planning/Debt-Consolidation/Consumer-Debt-Statistics, August 18, 2011).

When we become caught in the spiral of not enough, the need for more is addictive. Too many of us fall into the trap of showering those we love with more and thus perpetuating the addiction instead of being intentional about the gifts we are giving.

When we know how much enough is, there will always be enough.

Spiritual Practice

Amid the cries of “There is not enough,” name what you most want. Having named what you most want, are these the things Jesus promised would be yours when he said, “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33)? What will be yours as you live into the kingdom of God? Is it enough?

Questions for Reflection

What might change in our community and in this world if we were willing to share our resources and collaborate with one another?

What will happen if we don’t move beyond our anxiety regarding not enough, our enslavement to the idea that more is better, or our resignation that this is just the way it is?

What do you want most out of your life? What is enough for you?